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For as Long as We Both Shall Live

Love is more than just a feeling. Each person's interpretation of love is unique, so when someone says "I love you," that love might mean something different for the person saying it and the person hearing it. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, readers watch the romantic tragedy of the mysterious Jay Gatsby and beautiful Daisy Buchanan through the eyes of Nick, a common friend and young businessman. Their story would make anyone reconsider what love really means. Fitzgerald wrote *The Great Gatsby* to show that in relationships, love or compassion does not necessarily imply a sense of commitment to a person, and a sense of commitment does not necessarily imply love and compassion.

Tom Buchanan is a grown up version of a typical high school jock. He's big and strong, but he's not too smart. He's married to Daisy, but he is actively having an affair with a woman named Myrtle Wilson. This relationship is filled with irony: Daisy is beautiful and charming; Myrtle is neither. It is also ironic that Tom still feels some sort of commitment to his wife even though he's cheating on her with Myrtle. At a party in Manhattan, when a drunken Myrtle cries out, "Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!... I'll say it whenever I want to!" (41), Tom actually gets so angry that he strikes her and breaks her nose. Even while choosing to be with Myrtle over his wife, he feels the need to protect his wife. It actually seems that he cares for both women, but he does not feel committed to either.

This theme against commitment is not just connected with the main characters. Fitzgerald portrays it as the common behavior for many married couples during the 1920s, when the book is set. Nick, attending one of Gatsby's elaborate parties, notices that "most of the remaining women were now having fights with men said to be their husbands" (56). One such husband "was talking with a curious intensity

to a young actress, and his wife after attempting to laugh at the situation in a dignified and indifferent way broke down entirely and resorted to flank attacks..." (56). Flirtation and even pursuit of other relationships, even in the presence of one's spouse, is common in the world Fitzgerald creates. People cheat on the person they have vowed to love for eternity. It again brings up the point that their love and commitment do not always go hand in hand, so to speak.

The main affair that takes place in the book is between Daisy and Gatsby. Having been separated for years, their new time together is truly magical for both of them. Both Daisy and Tom attend a party at Gatsby's home. Nick watches Gatsby and Daisy dance with each other: "I remembered being surprised by his graceful, conservative fox trot – I had never seen him dance before. Then they sauntered over to my house and sat on the steps for a half hour while at her request I remained watchfully in the garden" (112). Daisy leaves Tom for a long period of the evening to be with Gatsby, a man Tom doesn't even know really anything about. Neither Gatsby nor Daisy appear to care much about the suspiciousness and bluntness of their behavior. This attitude intensifies later in the book when Gatsby is at Daisy's and as Tom leaves the room, "she got up and went over to Gatsby, and pulled his face down, kissing him on the mouth" (122). She is not afraid to show public affection toward Gatsby, even so close to her husband. This is because although she has vowed her commitment to her husband, she really seems to love Gatsby, and she does not seem to feel love for Tom.

Finally, the love triangle has it out. Daisy confesses to Tom that she loves Gatsby, not him. And for a moment, it seems that Gatsby has won. He will keep Daisy. But then Gatsby insists on hearing that she never loved Tom – that, in effect, commitment and love can be entirely separate. She was committed to Tom, but she always loved Gatsby. This is where Fitzgerald gets tricky with his theme: he doesn't let commitment and love get entirely separated. Daisy admits she had once had feelings for Tom; she'd loved them both. "You loved me too?" (133) Gatsby asks, looking as if he'd been punched in the stomach. It turns out, while love and commitment are not necessarily connected, keeping them entirely separated is like sending a two-year-old outside in his dress clothes and telling him not to get dirty.

Later, Gatsby in the passenger seat, Daisy runs over Tom's mistress, Myrtle, killing her. Gatsby says he's willing to take the blame for her – "Of course I'll say I was [driving]," he tells Nick. Yet despite a night-long vigil outside her window, he never gets so much as a thank you from her. In fact, he gets killed for his troubles, when Mr. Wilson takes his revenge – and she does not even attend his funeral. This was the man who, days earlier, she "loved." She and Tom leave town, retreating into their "vast carelessness" and heading to "wherever rich people go to be together," according to Nick's bitter observations.

There is such a thing as commitment. Recently, thousands of people in New Orleans waited out flooding, looting, and other hardships out of a commitment to their sense of home. Similar sacrifices have been made since time began, by parents, soldiers, lovers and "saints." But commitment needs an object – one is committed to something; to simply "be committed" is actually a euphemism for going crazy and getting sent to a mental institution! Daisy turned out to be committed not to love, in the end, but to her own riches and comfort. If a person were to fall in love with someone, Fitzgerald is suggesting with Gatsby, he should make sure his lover is committed to him. Or else people become what Gatsby turned out to be – and what Daisy once said she hoped her daughter would not be in this cruel, noncommittal world: a fool.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York, NY: Scribner, 1996. Print.